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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Hurricane Michael hammers Fla. Panhandle

Associated Press

PANAMA CITY, Fla. — Search and rescue teams fanned out across the Florida Panhandle to reach trapped people in Michael's wake Thursday as daylight yielded scenes of rows upon rows of houses smashed to pieces by the third-most-powerful hurricane on record to hit the continental U.S.

At least two deaths were blamed on Michael, and it wasn't done yet. Though weakened into a tropical storm, it continued to bring heavy rain and blustery winds to the Southeast as it pushed inland, soaking areas still recovering from last month's Hurricane Florence.

Under a perfectly clear, blue sky, Florida families emerged tentatively from darkened shelters and hotels to an unfamiliar, perilous landscape of shattered homes and shopping centers, beeping security alarms, wailing sirens and hovering helicopters.

The full extent of the damage was only slowly becoming clear, with some of the stricken areas difficult to reach because of roads blocked by debris or water. An 80-mile stretch of Interstate 10, the main east-west route along the Panhandle, was

closed.

Some of the worst damage was in Mexico Beach, where Michael crashed ashore Wednesday as a Category 4 monster with 155 mph winds and a storm surge of 9 feet. Video from a drone Thursday revealed widespread devastation across the town of about 1,000 people.

Entire blocks of homes near the beach were obliterated, leaving nothing but concrete slabs in the sand. Rows and rows of other homes were reduced to piles of splintered debris or were crumpled and slumped at odd angles.

A National Guard team got into Mexico Beach and found 20 survivors overnight, and more crews were pushing into the area in the morning, with the fate of many residents unknown.

Authorities said 285 people in Mexico Beach had refused to leave ahead of the hurricane despite a mandatory evacuation order.

Mishelle McPherson and her ex-husband searched for the elderly mother of a friend. The woman lived in a small, cinderblock house about 150 yards from the Gulf and thought she would be OK.

Her home was reduced to crumbled cin-

derblocks and pieces of floor tile.

"Aggy! Aggy!" McPherson yelled. The only sound that came back was the echo from the half-demolished building and the pounding of the surf.

"Do you think her body would be here? Do you think it would have floated away?" she asked.

As she walked down the street, McPherson pointed out pieces of what had been the woman's house. "That's the blade from her ceiling fan. That's her floor tile."

The beach town was difficult to reach by land, with roads covered by fallen trees, power lines and other debris.

The governor pleaded with people in the hard-hit areas to stay away for now.

"I know you just want to go home. You want to check on things, and begin the recovery process," Gov. Rick Scott said. But "we have to make sure things are safe."

More than 900,000 homes and businesses in Florida, Alabama, Georgia and the Carolinas were without power.

Thousands of National Guard troops, law enforcement officers and medical teams began making their way across the stricken zone.

Military grounds all F-35s to check engine component

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY
AND COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The U.S. military has grounded its fleet of F-35s following a recent crash in South Carolina to inspect the fighter jets' engine fuel tubes, the Pentagon announced Thursday.

The grounding is in response to data from the ongoing investigation of the Marine Corps' F-35B Lightning II that crashed near Beaufort, S.C., on Sept. 28, according to a statement by the F-35 Joint Program Office. The pilot was able to eject safely, but the aircraft was a total loss.

"At this time, the cause of the mishap has not yet been determined," said Capt. Christopher

Harrison, a U.S. Marine Corps spokesman.

However, the inspections are looking at a certain kind of fuel tube that is estimated to be in about half the F-35 fleet, U.S. officials told The Washington Post. There are more than 340 F-35s being used now by the U.S. and other countries.

The Marine Corps and the Air Force have confirmed the grounding of their F-35s is a precaution so the aircraft can be inspected.

"If suspect fuel tubes are installed, the part will be removed and replaced," according to the Joint Program Office statement. "If known good fuel tubes are already installed, then those aircraft will be returned to flight status."

Inspections are expected to be completed within the next 24 to 48 hours.

A day before the crash in South Carolina, another Marine Corps F-35B Lightning II was used in its first U.S. combat mission to strike a Taliban target in Afghanistan.

The Joint Program Office statement included "international partners" in the flight operation grounding, though the United Kingdom's Ministry of Defence tweeted they have only "paused some F-35 flying as a precautionary measure while we consider the findings of an ongoing enquiry."

The F-35 program, the most expensive weapon in U.S. military history, has been marred by delays and cost overruns

and other mechanical issues. The F-35 program is expected to cost the Pentagon about \$406 billion for 2,456 fighter jets that the services intend to buy, according to the Joint Program Office.

Rep. Mike Turner, R-Ohio, chairman of a House Armed Services Committee subpanel, said Thursday that he received a briefing from the Marine Corps on the crash in Beaufort.

"From the ongoing investigation, I am glad that the Department of Defense took swift and decisive action to keep the F-35 fleet and its pilots safe," said Turner, who is chairman of the House Armed Services Committee on tactical air and land forces.

Greece presses for larger US presence

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Greece has invited the U.S. to set up new bases in the country, offering up coastal northeastern cities that would place American forces at the gateway to the Black Sea and in close proximity to the Balkans.

Greek Defense Minister Panos Kammenos, during a news briefing Wednesday with U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, said Athens wants the U.S. to establish a larger, more permanent presence in Greece.

While a base at Souda Bay on the island of Crete has long been a key location for the U.S. Navy, the Pentagon is welcome to build up in other Greek locales, Kammenos said.

“It is very important for Greece that the United States deploy military assets in Greece

on a more permanent basis, not only in Souda Bay but also in Larissa, in Volos, in Alexandroupoli,” he said.

Greece is pressing for more troops at a time when regional rival Turkey has become more unpredictable and Russia more active in Greece’s neighborhood. In September, Greek officials made similar overtures during a visit by Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Joseph Dunford.

Greece hasn’t said what type of American military presence it seeks, and the U.S. hasn’t signaled a desire to build anything new. Still, Greece’s calls for more cooperation have been welcomed by Mattis and Dunford.

Mattis cited a growing defense relationship “with increased joint exercises and training, expanded basing cooperation and enhanced defense-industrial partnerships.”

The statements on Wednesday marked the first time Greece has publicly offered specific locations for basing in a meeting with U.S. defense officials.

Alexandroupoli and Volos are port cities on the Aegean Sea that would give the U.S. military a stronger foothold in a region viewed by the Pentagon as growing in strategic importance.

In addition to Souda Bay, the U.S. operates MQ-9 Reaper drones out of Greece’s Larissa Air Force Base. Kammenos also said the U.S. can grow at Larissa, which gives the U.S. a surveillance outpost that can reach into Syria, northern Africa and the Black Sea region.

Greece joins fellow NATO member Poland as countries clamoring for more U.S. troops. Poland is pushing for a permanent military base and combat troops because of concerns about Russia.

While the U.S. military and NATO have focused much of their attention on the eastern flank of Russia in places like the Baltics and Poland, the greater Black Sea region also is regarded by some security analysts and military officials as a potential flashpoint with Russia.

NATO of late has kept a close eye on Russia’s moves in southern Europe, where there have been discussions within the alliance about setting up a Black Sea naval flotilla. So far, those efforts have failed to gain traction.

However, allies have noted Russia’s more assertive stance in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, where U.S. Navy leaders have said Russian patrols are occurring at levels not seen since the Cold War.

Russia’s access to the Mediterranean runs from the Black Sea, through Turkey’s Sea of Marmara and into the Aegean Sea.

Paratroopers investigated after friend dies

By NANCY MONTGOMERY
Stars and Stripes

VICENZA, Italy — Italian prosecutors are investigating whether four 173rd Airborne Brigade soldiers with Sgt. Kevin Connor on the night he died, possibly from alcohol poisoning, are criminally culpable.

Connor, 24, was found dead in the barracks after midnight on Oct. 1 after the soldiers called paramedics and said he had stopped breathing.

The soldiers had spent Sunday evening watching football and drinking at the Arena, the base bowling alley. By the time they left about 11 p.m., Connor could not stand on his own, according

to the newspaper *Il Giornale di Vicenza*.

The other soldiers helped him into one of their rooms and placed him on his side on the bathroom floor. Shortly after, they found he wasn’t breathing, according to the Italian newspaper.

Italian authorities are investigating whether the group of

soldiers were negligent in Connor’s death, including whether they should have sought help sooner.

The men have been appointed an Italian lawyer, who could not be reached for comment Wednesday. Maj. Chris Bradley, a brigade spokesman, declined to confirm the names of the implicated soldiers.

Prosecutor: Slain Marine was mobbed by pack of juveniles

The Honolulu Star-Advertiser

Marine Sgt. William Michael Brown was fatally stabbed in Waikiki last year after a pack of juveniles mobbed him and his friends, Deputy Prosecutor Ashley Tanaka told a state judge Tuesday.

An Oahu grand jury returned an indictment Tuesday charging one of the juveniles, Nicholas E. Torres, with murder. Torres was 16 years old at

the time of the stabbing and is 17 now. He was charged as an adult because a state Family Court judge waived the court’s jurisdiction over him last week.

Tanaka told Circuit Judge Collette Garibaldi that Brown, 23, and three friends — two men and one woman — were walking in Waikiki on Oct. 21 last year when two juvenile females approached the group and offered to sell them marijuana. That was about 1 a.m.

Brown and his friends said to the girls: “Don’t you look a little young? You still have braces. What are you doing out this late?” Tanaka said.

At that point, Tanaka said, a group of around 10 to 15 other juveniles, both boys and girls, surrounded Brown and his friends. An argument escalated into a physical fight, during which one of the juveniles grabbed Brown’s female friend’s purse and Torres stabbed Brown with

a hunting knife, Tanaka said.

The knife punctured Brown’s heart and left lung. A city ambulance transported Brown in critical condition to The Queen’s Medical Center where he later died.

Brown was a mortarman assigned to Weapons Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment at Marine Corps Base Hawaii in Kaneohe.

Report: Obesity hurts national security

(Newport News, Va.) Daily Press

Eight years after publishing a report titled “Too Fat to Fight,” a group of retired admirals and generals said Wednesday that obesity continues to threaten national security.

The group, Mission: Readiness, said obesity disqualifies 31 percent of young Americans from military service, up from 27 percent eight years ago. The new report, “Unhealthy and Unprepared,” cites Defense Department data and independent studies.

The group has been beating this drum for years. It followed “Too Fat To Fight” in 2010 two years later with a study called “Still Too Fat To Fight.” In 2014, it published “Retreat Is Not An Option,” which offered much the same picture.

The obesity problem is part of a larger concern. Overall, about 71 percent of Americans in that 17-to-24 age group do not qualify for military service due to criminal

records, a poor education or other factors that include obesity.

National statistics offer little evidence of a turnaround, although one member of Mission: Readiness sees reason for hope at the state and local level.

“Childhood obesity in some states ... is not getting worse and may be in some cases getting better,” said retired Army Lt. Gen. Thomas Spoehr, a College of William & Mary graduate who now serves with The Heritage Foundation, a conservative public policy think tank.

Although nearly one-third of Americans between the ages of 17 and 24 are too overweight to serve, the problem begins in childhood, the study says. The obesity rate among 2-year-old children is 14 percent; it climbs to 18 percent in the 6-to-11 age group.

The study points to preschools and child care centers as the first line of attack against childhood obesity.

It cites the Child and Adult Care Food Program as an example of good public policy. The program provides financial support for child care and other providers to receive nutritious meals and snacks.

School cafeterias are another battleground. New standards in the National School Lunch Program have increased fruit and vegetable consumption by 16 and 23 percent respectively, the study says.

Spoehr suggested schools should get more serious about recreation, providing students with more time for physical activity.

Ultimately, he said, overarching federal solutions may not be the best answer.

The group has been effective at the state level, where elected officials and policy-makers are closer to the problem, he said. Then it’s just a matter of replicating what works.

“You get successes and you build on those,” he said.

Marine spouse aims for US record in Decaman race

BY AYA ICHIHASHI

Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — A Marine Corps spouse on Okinawa has set her sights on beating the American record for a grueling invitation-only race that requires competitors to swim, bike and run a combined 1,406 miles within 13 days.

Alyx Ulbrich, 30, is among 16 athletes from around the world — and only five from the United States — competing in the inaugural Decaman USA race Nov. 6 in New Orleans.

Participants in her category — known as “Classic DECA” — will start off by swim-

ming 24 miles in a 50-meter pool at the University of New Orleans. That will be followed by a 1,120-mile bike ride and a 262-mile run at Fontainebleau State Park.

Compare that with a typical Ironman race, which consists of a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bike ride and a 26.2-mile run with no break.

Decaman USA also has a 1x10 category requiring competitors to finish one Ironman race a day for 10 days in a row.

“I wanted to try something that I don’t know if I can finish,” Ulbrich recently told Stars and Stripes. “I don’t know if I am physically capable or not. That interested me.”

Ulbrich — who had to submit a race résumé, doctor’s note and medical records to qualify for Decaman USA — is no stranger to tough competition. Last month, she was the top female and second overall finisher in the Wildcat 100 — a 100-mile ultramarathon in Pensacola, Fla., finishing in 28 hours, 11 minutes. In August, she placed first among women and third overall in the 8 Hours of Hell Racing Series in Southwest Florida.

“It was great practice (for Decaman). I am entering another Ironman race in Taiwan this weekend,” she said prior to an event in which she finished second in her age group in 10 hours, 25 minutes.

Hurricane-spawned mosquitoes swarm bases in NC

BY WILL MORRIS

Stars and Stripes

Thousands of rare mosquitoes spawned in the wake of Hurricane Florence are swarming servicemembers in bases across North Carolina, causing some training to be cut back while troops wait out the winged apocalypse.

The mosquito in question, psorophora ciliata, is bigger than most other species and is known for its vicious nature, said Army Capt. Neil Milan, an entomologist at Womack Army Medical Center at Fort

Bragg, N.C. It is wreaking havoc across the state.

“If they want to bite you, they will get to you,” Milan said. “They are some of the largest mosquitoes, one of the fastest breeding and one of the strongest and most aggressive flyers in the mosquito world. If you were trying to pick out an angry mosquito, it would be this guy.”

In addition to their size — about a centimeter for the body alone — the “shagged legged gallinipper,” as it is commonly known, has hairy black-and-white striped legs and large mouth parts that can easily

pierce through most clothing. It commonly attacks in swarms.

If that wasn’t bad enough, they are also resistant to DEET and permethrin, two chemicals commonly recommended by both the Army and the Marine Corps to repel biting insects. Their flying strength allows them to keep up with human hosts, even if they are running away.

“Some of the training here has been affected,” Milan said. “Some of the soldiers here don’t want to leave the garrison or their tents; they just don’t want to be outside.”

UN sees progress in securing Afghan parliament election

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — The United Nations on Thursday said NATO-trained, local security forces are creating conditions for most eligible Afghans to vote as Afghanistan braces for a spike in violence ahead of parliamentary elections next week.

Progress has been made despite significant security challenges, the U.N. Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, or UNAMA, said in a statement.

U.S. military officials in Afghanistan have said helping Afghan forces safeguard the elections, scheduled for Oct. 20, is one of the coalition's top priorities this year. Next week's vote is already three years overdue.

But security fears have prompted speculation from analysts that voter turnout might be low. Nearly 130 civilians have already been killed in the run-up to the vote, according to U.N. data, and the Taliban have vowed to disrupt the process further.

"Any violence or intimidation directed at voters, candidates or electoral officials is totally unacceptable, and I unequivocally condemn it," said Tadamichi Yamamoto, the head of UNAMA.

While American and other coalition troops are advising on security and logistics, Afghan forces are fully responsible for protecting the ballot.

"All our joint forces are ordered to try their best to secure the elections," Nasrat Rahimi, deputy spokesman for the Interior Ministry, told Stars and Stripes, adding that Afghan soldiers and police will be stationed at roughly 5,100 polling centers across the country on Election Day.

The number of polling centers was reduced from more than 7,350 due to security concerns, according to the Independent Election Commission. Reports of fraudulent voter registration and interference by strongmen have also marred the vote.

The Taliban, who consider the election a tool to advance the interests of foreign countries, called on their supporters to halt voting throughout the country "by creating severe obstacles for it." A statement by the insurgents on Monday added that all security personnel helping the process "should be targeted and no stone should be left unturned for the prevention and failure of this malicious American conspiracy."

UNAMA recently expressed concern that innocent people could be killed or injured in attacks on schools, health clinics and mosques, where many polling stations are located. The U.S. Embassy in Kabul on Thursday issued a warning to Americans visiting or living in the country, urging vigilance and caution in the coming weeks.

Astronauts safe after rocket failure, emergency landing

Associated Press

BAIKONUR, Kazakhstan — Two astronauts from the U.S. and Russia were safe Thursday after an emergency landing in the steppes of Kazakhstan following the failure of a Russian booster rocket carrying them to the International Space Station.

NASA astronaut Nick Hague and Roscosmos' Alexei Ovchinin lifted off as scheduled at 4:40 a.m. EDT Thursday from the Russian-leased Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan, but their Soyuz booster rocket failed about two minutes after the launch.

The rescue capsule automatically jettisoned from the booster and went into a ballistic descent, landing at a sharper than normal angle and subjecting the crew to heavy gravitational force.

NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine, who watched the launch at Baikonur along with his Russian counterpart, tweeted that Hague and Ovchinin are in good condition. He added that a "thorough investigation into the cause of the incident will be conducted."

The capsule landed about 12 miles east of the city of Dzhezkazgan in Kazakhstan. The astronauts were flown by helicopter to Dzhezkazgan and will later be taken to Baikonur and on to Star City, Russia's space training center outside Moscow.

While the Russian space program has been dogged by a string of launch failures and other incidents in recent years, Thursday's mishap marked the program's first manned launch failure since September 1983, when a Soyuz exploded on the launch pad.

"Thank God, the crew is alive," Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, told reporters when it became clear that the crew had landed safely. He added that the president is receiving regular updates about the situation.

It was to be the first space mission for Hague, who joined NASA's astronaut corps in 2013. Ovchinin spent six months on the orbiting outpost in 2016.

NASA posted pictures of Hague and Ovchinin undergoing a medical check-up at Dzhezkazgan's airport. One of the pictures showed Hague smiling and another had him sitting next to Russia's space agency chief Dmitry Rogozin.

Dzhezkazgan is about 280 miles northeast of Baikonur, and spacecraft returning from the ISS normally land in that region.

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Borisov said all manned launches will be suspended pending an investigation into the cause of the failure. He added that Russia will fully share all relevant information with the U.S.

Reports: Soldiers, guards part of Saudi team after missing writer

Associated Press

ISTANBUL — Saudi royal guards, intelligence officers, soldiers and an autopsy expert were part of a 15-member team from the kingdom that targeted missing writer Jamal Khashoggi, Turkish media said Thursday. The Washington Post contributor vanished last week while visiting the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul.

The reported details, coupled with more direct comments from Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, appear aimed at gradually pressuring Saudi Arabia to reveal what happened to Khashoggi while balancing Ankara's need to maintain the kingdom's investments in Turkey and relations on other issues.

Turkish officials say they fear Saudi Arabia killed and dismembered Khashoggi, without offering evidence explaining why they believe that. Khashoggi contributed

columns to the Post, including some critical of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Saudi Arabia, before going silent in recent days, called the allegation it abducted or harmed Khashoggi "baseless." However, it has offered no evidence to support its claim the writer simply walked out of its consulate and vanished despite his fiancée waiting outside for him.

Information continues to trickle out through Turkish media about the 15-man Saudi team previously described as an "assassination squad." Those leaks, largely matching across Turkey's state-run media and private Erdogan-linked outlets, likely come from the country's security services as another means to pressure the kingdom over Khashoggi's Oct. 2 disappearance.

Khashoggi had gone to the consulate Tuesday last week to get paperwork he needed for his upcoming marriage.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Truck spills load of salad dressing

MA MANSFIELD — A tractor-trailer hauling salad dressing spilled its cargo all over an interstate road in Massachusetts.

The truck was driving on Interstate 495 in Mansfield on Tuesday morning when it struck the underside of a bridge. The crash spilled the contents of the truck across the road, leaving only one lane open.

The driver of the tractor-trailer was taken to an area hospital for treatment of minor injuries.

Crews cleared the scene and southbound lanes were reopened later the same day.

Python dead from poisoned rodent

UT LOGAN — Authorities said a small python that was found in a Logan neighborhood was positively identified by his owners after it was reportedly stolen from their home this past summer.

But the Herald Journal reported that Logan Police Capt. Tyson Budge said the snake suffered convulsions and died several hours after he was picked up.

A necropsy — an autopsy for animals — was performed on the snake and police were informed that the python had ingested a poisoned rodent, causing it to hemorrhage internally.

Combat artist's works displayed at museum

VA NORFOLK — A museum in Virginia is displaying the paintings of an aviation combat artist from World War I.

The Chrysler Museum of Art in Norfolk said in a statement that it started showing the

paintings of Henri Farre in late September. They'll be on display until late January.

The exhibit commemorates the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I.

The French artist is said to have been the first to experience war in the air and depict it on canvas.

Counters hold first Squirrel Census

NY NEW YORK — It's one of the enduring mysteries of life in New York City: Just how many squirrels live in Central Park?

Counters started roaming the 840-acre park last weekend for its first Squirrel Census.

Organizers of the two-week count told The New York Times they're looking to learn more about squirrel behavior and urban green space.

Jamie Allen led similar censuses of Atlanta's Inman Park in 2012 and 2016. He said the projects are filling a data void on squirrels and exposing patterns in how they live.

The Central Park counters' findings will be made public in the spring.

Blind man safe thanks to sharp-nosed dog

MO HILLSBORO — A missing blind man is safe thanks to the nose of a 3-year-old black lab mix who sniffed him out.

Ruby was part of a weekend search team looking for the man in Hillsboro, 40 miles southwest of St. Louis. The man, who has epilepsy in addition to blindness, was reported missing Oct. 5.

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported that on Sunday, it was another bloodhound named Wally who first found one of the man's shoes. With the search area narrowed, Ruby picked up

the man's scent and headed to a creek bed, where Ruby's handler, Marla Vollmer, found the man.

Man accused of stealing firetruck

NV RENO — Reno police arrested a man accused of stealing a city firetruck and leading officers on a chase before he was arrested downtown.

Mark Williams, 23, was being held on charges of driving under the influence, disobeying a police officer, reckless driving and grand larceny.

Police allege he stole the fire engine that was sitting unlocked while paramedics were treating a potential stroke victim.

The Reno Gazette Journal reported officers spotted the truck near the Washoe County Courthouse and the chase briefly entered onto U.S. Interstate 80 before a police cruiser rammed the truck and Williams tried to flee on foot.

Students seek history beneath coffee shop

RI NEWPORT — Archaeology students in Newport spent a weekend excavating beneath a local coffee shop to unearth possible artifacts.

Salve Regina University assistant professor Jon Marcoux took students from his introductory course class to Empire Tea & Coffee to dig in the dirt-floor area underneath the coffee shop. The Newport Daily News reported building owner Paul Tobak found remnants of a former dwelling in the basement area in 2016 — sparking Marcoux's interest in the site.

Marcoux said he plans more excavations this month and that he would like to work with the university's historic preservation department to understand the history of the site.

Man claims false arrest, sues Disney

FL ORLANDO — A New York man who was arrested for getting into an altercation with a Walt Disney World worker just moments before he planned to propose to his fiancée is suing the theme park resort, claiming he never touched the employee.

Marc Rubin filed the lawsuit last month in state court in Orlando alleging false arrest.

The lawsuit said Rubin was scouting out a location in front of Cinderella's Castle in the Magic Kingdom to propose to his future wife three years ago. A Disney employee asked him to move back from the parade route.

The Orlando Sentinel reported that the Disney worker told deputies that Rubin screamed and grabbed her, something he denies.

Lincoln museum head cuts foundation tie

IL SPRINGFIELD — Friction over a stovepipe hat's connection to Abraham Lincoln has prompted the director of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum to dissolve his \$25,000 consulting contract with the organization's fundraising arm.

Alan Lowe told The Associated Press his "top priority" is as director of the Lincoln museum. He said he is "at odds on some issues" with the Lincoln Presidential Library Foundation so he ended the contract.

Lowe said in a statement he wasn't fully informed about the foundation's secret and inconclusive DNA testing to determine whether a prize stovepipe hat belonged to Lincoln.

From wire reports

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Boston's Cora on other side this year

Associated Press

BOSTON — Alex Cora led Boston to a victory over the hated Yankees. Next up for the first-year Red Sox manager: the team he left after winning a World Series as a bench coach last season.

"I've been talking about them the whole season, so now we go," he said after the Red Sox beat New York 4-3 in Game 4 of the AL Division Series to earn the right to play the Houston Astros for the pennant. "Best of seven. They know me. I know them. It should be fun."

An infielder who spent 14 years with six big league teams, Cora was in Houston for one year before the Red Sox made him the first minority manager in franchise history — and one of its youngest, too. His first season is already a success, with a franchise-record 108 victories, a third consecutive AL East title and the team's first playoff series win since 2013.

Now he has to do it again

— against his former boss, A.J. Hinch, whose Astros swept Cleveland in the ALDS. Games 1 and 2 are Saturday and Sunday before the series moves to Houston for three more, if necessary.

"I don't know too much about them. Just they have a good team," Cora said coyly on Tuesday night. "What they did to the Indians, that was impressive. It seems like they're playing their best baseball of the season at the right time."

And so are the Red Sox, thanks to Cora.

In his first postseason series as a manager, he seemed to make all the right decisions, like starting Brock Holt in Game 3 and seeing him hit for the only postseason cycle in baseball history. And then he put Holt back on the bench in Game 4 and watched Ian Kinsler come through with a key RBI double.

"We're very fortunate to have a guy in A.C., who is not very far removed from playing the game, which definitely helps,"

Red Sox reliever Matt Barnes said. "You have a guy who won the World Series last year, so he knows what it takes to win a World Series."

"It seemed like every button he's pushing is the right one. I think he's got a great feel for the game. He understands the game. He does a great job of managing and communicating with everybody on what's going on, and I think it showed in this series, and it will be awesome moving forward."

Hinch said he is happy for his former assistant, who was a sounding board on strategy and preparation and took over when Hinch was ejected.

"(I'm) trying to remember some things that I told him that I wish I wouldn't have," Hinch said Wednesday when the Astros worked out for the first time since learning their next opponent.

"The bench coach and the manager are really tight," Hinch said. "He was obviously right next to me every step of the way. As a bench coach,

you're kind of involved in everything (but) maybe master of nothing when it comes to not being in charge."

Cora also served as a link to the players, a role that has served him well in Boston. Red Sox players — including a couple that were Cora's teammates when he was with the team from 2005-08 — praised the relatability of their 42-year-old manager after five years with the more traditional and distant John Farrell.

The Astros saw it as well.

"He was a great coach and he meant a lot to me," Houston shortstop Carlos Correa said Wednesday. "Getting to spend a full season with him last year was pretty special. I learned a lot of things from him. He's a brilliant mind. He knows a lot about the game."

Hinch and Cora have maintained a friendship through their year apart, even exchanging text messages through the first round.

That's going to stop.

Astros put on impressive show in advancing to ALCS

Associated Press

When the challenge arose in August, the Houston Astros responded like champions.

They're doing it again in October.

Two months ago, last year's World Series winners hit one of those predictable lulls that every team encounters during the dog days of a season. Maybe feeling a bit overconfident and invincible, the Astros were caught atop the AL West by the Oakland Athletics, a scrappy squad that sneaked up on everyone in 2018.

Just when it appeared the Astros might be in some trouble, they switched on their afterburners. After Aug. 18, Houston went 29-10 to finish with 103 wins.

"There is an extra gear that our guys have," manager A.J. Hinch said. "And once we hit

the postseason, it looks like, as of right now, our guys really, really turned it on."

Showing no weaknesses while exposing the Cleveland Indians' flaws at every opportunity, the Astros took a step toward defending their crown with a surprisingly easy three-game AL Division Series sweep.

Houston outscored Cleveland 21-6. The Astros outhit the Indians .327 to .144 and banged out eight homers without making an error.

The Astros, who gave themselves time to relax while Boston and New York slugged it out in the other ALDS, can win in so many different ways.

They have one of baseball's best rotations, anchored by Justin Verlander and Gerrit Cole, a devastating 1-2 pitching punch that staggered the Indians in Houston. The Astros can play

long ball, small ball and any kind of ball needed with a balanced lineup loaded with contact hitters.

Sure, they've got All-Stars in Jose Altuve and Alex Bregman, but the Astros are a selfless group that plays as one.

"We have the most complete team in baseball," Verlander said between puffs on a cigar as his teammates showered each other with champagne in the clubhouse. "I've been part of really special teams, but the drive to win here trumps everything else. Everybody is OK with whoever is the hero."

It was Verlander in Game 1, Marwin Gonzalez in Game 2, and George Springer was among a number of deserving candidates with two homers in Game 3.

Springer has found his groove at the right time. The 2017 World

Series MVP was sidelined by a sprained left thumb that landed him on the disabled list in August. He struggled after returning and connected on just three homers in the final six weeks of the regular season.

The postseason is his playground.

Springer hit three homers in the final two ALDS games, giving him a franchise record 10 postseason homers.

"I said this to our team in there — special teams do special things in October," Hinch said. "And I believe that about players. George is one of them. We've seen him come up as an uber-prospect, produce at an uncanny level, hit the lowest of the lows in the World Series and then be the World Series MVP."

"I don't think this should surprise anyone. He's a really special player."

Dodgers pin all their hopes on Machado

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Even with all their star power and deep pockets, all their booming hitters and ace pitchers, the Los Angeles Dodgers are approaching three decades since their last World Series championship.

They're making another run at that elusive title.

Only this time, Manny Machado is along for the ride.

The slugging shortstop hit a three-run homer that wrapped up a 6-2 victory over the Atlanta Braves on Monday, sending Los Angeles to the NL Championship Series for the third year in a row and fourth time in six seasons.

This is what the Dodgers had in mind when they acquired the free agent-to-be from the lowly Baltimore Orioles back in July.

They're hoping Machado is the one who turns Tinseltown into Titledown for the first time since 1988.

"Can't say enough about him," Los Angeles manager Dave Roberts said. "A player of his caliber, there are so many expectations put on him."

Machado had only three hits

in a 3-1 division series victory over the Braves, but two of them were homers. He finished with six RBIs.

"We prepared ourselves to get here," Machado said. "We're not going to stop till we get what we want."

Clearly, nothing less than a World Series title will do.

While the Dodgers went through the customary celebration that follows any post-season victory — they doled out T-shirts and caps, posed for pictures in the middle of SunTrust Park, then doused themselves with beer in the clubhouse — the focus turned quickly to the next round.

The Dodgers will face the Brewers in the NLCS. Game 1 is Friday night in Milwaukee.

"We all know that there's a lot more work to be done," Roberts said. "We have eight more wins to go."

Los Angeles spent much of the season locked in a tight race with division rivals Colorado and Arizona, and required a one-game playoff with the Rockies to clinch its sixth straight NL West title.

"We took a hard path to get to this point, but I do think it made us stronger and kind of galvanized our team," Roberts said.

It certainly helps to have a player of Machado's caliber bolstering an already potent lineup. The Dodgers hit a franchise-record 235 homers during the regular season, and added eight more in the NLDS.

"They're a very powerful team," Atlanta manager Brian Snitker said. "It's what they've done all year is hit home runs. We're not built like that yet."

Indeed, the Baby Braves were thoroughly overmatched in their first postseason appearance since 2013, hitting .154 overall and scoring just eight runs. Though the future looks bright for a team that pulled off a massive rebuilding job much quicker than expected, Atlanta was not quite ready to contend with a team of the Dodgers' quality.

Los Angeles had too much power, too much depth, too much pitching.

This is a franchise desperate to win one more game than

it did a season ago, when the Houston Astros took Game 7 of the World Series at Dodger Stadium.

That's why they acquired Machado.

"Coming over from Baltimore midway through the season — new ball club, new atmosphere, new teammates, new coaching staff, new front office, I mean, it's always a bit of an adjustment," he said. "But they've been nothing but amazing to us, to myself and my family. And coming here to a winning ballclub that's been determined the whole way since last year to get into this situation and further, I'm just sitting here enjoying everything, enjoying the ride."

Machado wasn't the only in-season acquisition to play a key role in the clinching victory over the Braves. The Dodgers picked up David Freese, MVP of St. Louis' improbable victory in the 2011 World Series, from Pittsburgh just minutes before the trade deadline. He came through with a pinch-hit, two-run single that put the Dodgers ahead to stay in the sixth.

Patriots prepping for versatile Chiefs QB Mahomes

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — When Bill Belichick was asked Monday what he liked about Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes, his answer sounded a lot like everyone else's this season.

"Pretty much everything," Belichick said of the second-year player as the Patriots began preparations for Sunday night's matchup with Kansas City (5-0).

"He gets the ball to all of his receivers quick, quick release, sees things quickly, can extend plays, got a great arm, got a fabulous arm, can throw the ball out of the stadium."

It was glowing praise from a coach who has a track record of finding ways to make things difficult for young quarterbacks.

Belichick will now turn his

attention to the 23-year-old Mahomes, who has been the talk of the NFL, throwing for 1,513 yards, 14 touchdowns and just two interceptions through five games.

He appeared in just one game last season, leading the Chiefs to a three-point victory in their regular-season finale against the Broncos. But it was enough for Kansas City to believe Mahomes could be their quarterback and played into its decision to trade Alex Smith to Washington in the offseason.

Mahomes has taken control of Andy Reid's offense, using his legs and arm to lead a group that is averaging a league-best 35 points per game.

Patriots quarterback Tom Brady said during his weekly radio appearance on Boston's WEEI that young quarterbacks such as Mahomes and rookies

Sam Darnold, Baker Mayfield, Josh Allen and Josh Rosen are taking advantage of the early opportunities they've gotten.

"A lot of those guys are being thrown into the mix," Brady said. "Some of those guys are playing really well. It's pretty awesome. I was a fourth-string quarterback when I was a rookie, so I was sitting in the stands, eating nachos before games. I wasn't playing. ... Some other guys have had those chances. And when you're thrown into the mix it's really impressive."

It will be a big challenge for New England's defense, which is giving up 366 yards per game and has had trouble defending the pass during a 1-2 start to the season.

Patriots cornerbacks coach Josh Boyer said one of the underrated parts of Mahomes' game is his ability to use his

legs to set up deep passes.

"With Mahomes in particular, one, he can make all the throws he needs to make, has a very strong arm. He also has a great ability to extend plays, whether he's going to do that running or extending it and scramble to give his receivers time to get open," Boyer said.

"So, we've got to do a great job being where we need to be, using our help in coverage if we have any, and making sure that we're tight on receivers in competitive situations."

Cornerback Stephon Gilmore said he expects Mahomes to be a handful to defend.

"He's a great quarterback," Gilmore said. "He's playing really good right now. He's making some big throws and he's got a lot of good weapons around him. They're 5-0 for a reason."

Butler says he was honest with Wolves

Associated Press

Jimmy Butler is back with the Minnesota Timberwolves, and his first practice of the season had fireworks.

He caused them — with his words and his play.

Butler, who asked for a trade more than three weeks ago, practiced with the Timberwolves for the first time this season in Minneapolis on Wednesday. ESPN reported that Butler verbally challenged players, coaches and even general manager Scott Layden in the practice, during which Butler dominated the team's scrimmages even when going up against stars like Karl-Anthony Towns and Andrew Wiggins.

In an interview taped with ESPN after practice, Butler acknowledged that "a lot" of the network's report was true and that the scene in practice was him just showing passion and being "brutally honest."

"All my emotion came out at one time," Butler said in the interview. "Was it the right way to do it? No. But I can't control that when I'm out there, com-

peting. That's my love of the game. That's raw me. Me at my finest, me at my purest. That's what you're going to get inside the lines."

The four-time NBA All-Star said he warned coach Tom Thibodeau before practice that he would let his emotions out if he played, and that's apparently what happened.

"I haven't played basketball in so long," Butler said during the interview. "And I'm so passionate and I love the game and I don't do it for any other reason except for to compete and go up against the best to try to prove that I can hang."

This saga started in mid-September, when it became known that Butler told Thibodeau that he wanted a trade. Thibodeau has said the team will try to make Butler happy, but has cautioned throughout the process that Minnesota will only do a deal that it deems is good for Minnesota.

"We're always going to do what's best for the team," Thibodeau said. "That's the important thing for everyone to understand, and if that means he's here, then he'll be here."

Thibodeau lauded Butler's fire after practice Wednesday.

"If he's here, or he's somewhere else, once he gets there or he's here, he's going to give you everything he has," Thibodeau said. "He's a competitor."

Butler was Minnesota's leading scorer last season and helped the Wolves snap a 14-year playoff drought. He can exercise his right to become a free agent after this season and command a deal that might be worth up to \$190 million. So as if a trade involving someone as talented as Butler wasn't enough of a challenge, there's also his looming contract situation for potential suitors to consider.

The Timberwolves have had talks with several teams since Butler made the request — including Miami — and nearly got a deal done with the Heat over the weekend. But those negotiations broke down, a person with direct knowledge of the talks told The Associated Press. The person said on Wednesday that the Heat have not initiated any further conversation with Minnesota since. The person spoke to the AP on condition of

anonymity because details of the trade talks have not been publicly disclosed.

Butler, in the ESPN interview, insisted money is not his motivation — and indicated he's been unhappy in Minnesota for some time.

"It's not about money," Butler said. "It's about saying, 'We need you. We want you here. We can't do this without you.' And that was the disconnect all year long. You're saying one thing and you're saying it, you're saying it, you're saying it. ... Actions speak louder than words."

Minnesotaguard Jeff Teague, a close friend of Butler's, said after practice Wednesday that Butler's status shouldn't be a distraction for Wolves players.

"It's part of the game," Teague said. "I don't think it's distracting me, but maybe it is distracting some other guys. Either way, man, I love Jimmy. Jimmy is my guy. But if he's not here, we've got a good team."

Butler said in the interview he only wants happiness.

"Whoever I suit up for ... I'm going to do my job," Butler said.

NHL roundup

Capitals win Stanley Cup Final rematch with Knights

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Evgeny Kuznetsov is dancing with the puck and celebrating when it's in the net just like last June.

Kuznetsov continued his wizardry against the Vegas Golden Knights on Wednesday night, scoring a goal and assisting on three more as part of a 5-2 Washington Capitals victory in a rematch of last season's Stanley Cup Final.

Kuznetsov assisted on two goals by Alex Ovechkin and one by Nicklas Backstrom and scored his own on the power play. The leading scorer in the Cup Final with eight points in five games, Kuznetsov has

seven points through the defending champions' first three games of the regular season.

"If you play with the good players, you're always gonna get points," Kuznetsov said after one of the best all-around games of his career. "It's just about have fun every night you go out there. If you don't have fun and you don't want to enjoy, you don't want to play hockey, you should be retired. But you can see we always have fun."

The Capitals are having plenty of fun right now with the franchise's Stanley Cup banner in the rafters and almost the same team back. Perhaps most importantly, they still have Kuznetsov and Ovechkin, whose sublime

chemistry from the playoffs was again on display against the Golden Knights.

"He knows when to pass, he knows when to shoot," said Ovechkin, who has four goals in three games. "Sometimes he try to make crazy pass. You think, 'What's he doing?' But he have his own mind. ... You just have to be ready at any second."

Coyotes 3, Ducks 2 (SO): Nick Cousins scored in the shootout, Antti Raanta made 23 saves and the visiting Coyotes earned their first win of the season.

Dylan Strome and Brad Richardson scored for Arizona (1-2), which dropped its first 11

games last season.

The Coyotes got their first goal this season when Strome converted a power-play opportunity with 2½ minutes left in the first. They were the last NHL team to score.

Flyers 7, Senators 4: Jakub Voracek and Scott Laughton scored two goals apiece, and Philadelphia rebounded from an embarrassing loss to beat host Ottawa.

Sean Couturier, Robert Hagg and Claude Giroux also scored for the Flyers, who were coming off an 8-2 loss to the San Jose Sharks in their home opener a night earlier. Calvin Pickard stopped 31 shots.